

Kissing a pummeled heart

by Ruth Yellowhawk



How do we kiss a pummeled heart? How do we lift the broken spirit of a young woman whose life has been cast aside and spat upon, regarded with no more interest than a torn dollar bill underfoot? Do we softly stroke her forehead? Resurrect the healing songs?

When I first saw the topic of this edition of *timbre!*—"Human Trafficking"—I panicked. This is something I'm sure I know nothing about. I thought this would require me to find someone who has been a victim firsthand. But visits to the Multi-Cultural and the Refugee Center yielded nothing.

Visits within however, offered a more complex journey. As always I began with the phrase, human trafficking. Who deigned to relegate such abhorrent practices to such a softball phrase? I ponder the well-respected essay "Politics and the English Language" by George Orwell, which posits that so much evil is wrapped in euphemisms so we can comfort ourselves in a persistent cloak of lies and misinterpretations of reality. Thus we accept killing as a human "casualty." Human trafficking as what then? People as cars, as drugs? Drugs feels closer to the truth as this practice seems to feed the most base addiction of power over another.

Where then does that leave us, those who digest publications such as this, in terms of our own sense of power? Do we fast, as one organization suggests, or watch documentary films as does another? Do we pray? Look for signs of humans at risk? None of this feels authentic to me.

I want to look at the role of men in this slave work, this soulless world economic plan. I want to look at little girls of color, healthy, vibrant and intact, running uphill to see what's there, while their parents smile at their carefree and curious natures. The number one effect of human bondage is that it rends

the family apart. The most detrimental effect of human slavery is that the family's roots are severed, the victim's identity is rendered null and void, or as the photo (right) suggests, their identity is reduced to a barcode.

Consider these staggering economic statistics from Stanford University: Some estimates place the number of children being "trafficked" at 1.2 million per year.

For now could we simply reflect on our own relationship to the issue, to power, to the plight of women everywhere? A few days ago I saw an elderly man possessively holding the elbow of a young Asian woman in a local café. Her eyes were cast down: his were empty. Later as I read the local paper I noticed the advertisements: "Untouched, young, busty, hot, Asian, first time, slender, long hair...." This goes on for three columns.

Back to words and the power lost when we either fail to use them, or replace them as if they were useless appliances. Let's just start with simple greetings: In Fiji, *Bula!* is shared at every human passing and translated to English it means simply "I see you." *Namaste* is Sanscrit for such thoughts as: "The light in me acknowledges the light in you," or "Your spirit and my spirit are One," or "That which is of God in me greets that which is of God in you." The words *Shalom* and *Aloha* carry similar intentions. Some say the Lakota greeting *Mitakuyapi* means "I greet you as a relative."

I don't share these words here as an etymologist or to simply wordsmith but as a woman grappling with how the impact of even naming a practice might be affected by our words in action. Could we evoke change by greeting one another differently, deeply, as humans travelling together, not as penned-in, powerless people subject to road rage by this issue?

This topic has left me with nothing but the hard questions I had at the start.

Let's consider the role of Mennonite men and women in answering them together. As for me, I carry on with the education of my son on this issue. 📖



Can a human being be reduced to nothing more than an object with a barcode?